the Byelorussian people to acquire both the inexhaustible cultural treasures of the Russian people and the great cultural values created by the Socialist Revolution'. 665 186

At the same time, Stalin's opponents among the Byelorussian communists were accused of having been too liberal to the Polish minority in Byelorussia, a strange accusation from a party which professes to adhere to an internationalist ideology. The 'polonizing activities' of the Byelorussian 'Trotskyites, Bukharinites and national-fascists' consisted in having allowed a number of localities in Byelorussia to conduct their business in the Polish language and in having sanctioned the existence of a number of Polish schools.[33] 543

The purge of the Byelorussian communists terminated the policy of tolerance which the Byelorussian Government had shown towards its national minorities. This tolerance had been symbolically expressed in the coat of arms of the Byelorussian S.S.R., which contained the inscription 'Workers of the World Unite' in four languages: Byelorussian, Great Russian, Yiddish and Polish. The coat of arms in use since 1937 shows the same inscription in Byelorussian and Great Russian only. Together with the Polish inscription in Byelorussia's coat of arms the 'Polish National District' of the Byelorussian S.S.R. likewise disappeared. This district had served purposes similar to those of the 'Polish National District' of the Ukraine. It was called after Feliks Dzerzhinsky. [186]

KOLAS AND KUPALA – BYELORUSSIAN LEADERS

The history of the fight between the Kremlin and Byelorussian nationalism includes the interesting case of the two prominent poets and writers, Yanko Kupala (1882-1942) and Yakub Kolas, whom the Soviet régime drew over to the side of the 'proletarian revolution'. Both belonged to the petty bourgeois Byelorussian nationalist movement grouped around the weekly *Nasha Niva* (Our Cornfield) which long before the October Revolution was the first publication to advocate autonomy for the Byelorussian people. 186 538

Kupala was the son of an impoverished nobleman unable to pay for a higher education for his son. Kolas was of peasant origin. Kupala and Kolas had in common their violent hatred of the Polish landowners who owned over 6,000,000 acres of Byelorussian soil in 1914. As a symbolic challenge to the Poles they both threw off their Polish-sounding family names of Lutsevich and Mitskevich respectively and became known under their literary pseudonyms.

Kupala and Kolas found it difficult to overcome their 'bourgeois prejudices'. In their innermost feelings they remained nationalists however hard they tried to be 'good Soviet citizens'. In one of his poems

*[Cf. category 186, pp. 155-157 -- Analyst]

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Kupala avowed his incapacity to become a real Bolshevik poet, thinking in terms of the whole Soviet Union and of all mankind:

'My Fatherland – it is the whole world,
I have torn myself away from my native soil!
Yet still I am not free from it – in sleep
I dream of Byelorussia!'

The role which Kolas and Kupala played in Soviet Byelorussia is unparalleled throughout the U.S.S.R. No Byelorussian Bolshevik ever assumed the role of a national leader of the Byelorussians – the leadership was in the hands of Kolas and Kupala. Instead of 'removing' the two poets, the Soviet régime tried to direct their poetic creation into the 'right channels' and to use them for communist propaganda. Kolas and Kupala were often criticized, at times they seem to have been in disgrace but they never disappeared, as did many excellent writers and poets of almost all the major peoples of the Soviet Union.

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The purge of Kolas and Kupala[1] would have been tantamount to the bankruptcy of the Soviet cultural policy in the B.S.S.R., since the two were not only outstanding literary figures but actually cultural 'awakeners' of their people. Byelorussia could do without its 'national democrat' historians and folklorists, it could do without its leading communist politicians. Kolas and Kupala, however, were indispensable. Their case showed that there are limits even to purges in the Soviet Union. The purge in Byelorussia could not be carried so far as to endanger the cultural foundations of the third largest people of the Soviet Union. This is why Kolas and Kupala were spared despite all their 'sins' and 'deviations'.

The Soviet régime needed Kolas and Kupala not only as pillars of Byelorussian culture in the U.S.S.R. but also as the political heralds of Byelorussian irredentism which might evoke a response among the oppressed Byelorussian population of Poland. The two poets did indeed fulfil this task not as Bolsheviks but as nationalists and denounced most violently the partition of Byelorussia. Most typical in this respect was a poem by Kolas in which he cried out: 'Our homeland has been broken up by foreign robbers . . . Away with their frontiers! Down with their barriers! To us belong the fields and woods! Let us rise together with one mind and one will, happiness and freedom will not come to us of themselves! Long enough have we been hunted and driven from our homeland!'

'GREATER BYELORUSSIA'

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In September 1939 came the triumph for people like Kolas and Kupala,[2] who by the force of circumstances had abandoned national democracy and embraced some sort of Byelorussian national communism–Byelo-

1 [Cf. cat. 116, pp. 157-158 -- Analyst]
2 [Cf. category 538, pp. 157-158 -- Analyst]